



## **Childhood Absence Epilepsy**

### **What Is a Childhood Absence Epilepsy?**

It is a type of epilepsy that starts between 4 and 10-years-old. The patient usually has absence seizures, and 60% of the patients stop having seizures by the time they reach their teen years.

### **What Are the Signs & Symptoms of an Absence Seizure?**

An absence seizure starts suddenly in the middle of activity and ends abruptly. During the seizure, a child:

- Blanks out or has staring spells that last 5-20 seconds
- May flutter their eyes or look upward
- Is unaware of what is going on during the seizure
- Returns to normal activity and won't remember having the seizure after it's over
- Has lip-smacking, chewing movements, or fumbling movements in their hand(s)

Children can have many absence seizures in a day. They don't remember having the seizures, but older kids may realize that they lost time around them. These seizures often may be mistaken for daydreaming or inattention.

### **What Happens After an Absence Seizure?**

Absence seizures usually last about 10 to 20 seconds. After the seizure, most children return to what they were doing just before the seizure started as if nothing happened. But they won't recall what just happened or if someone talked to them during the seizure.

### **What Causes Childhood Absence Epilepsy?**

Childhood absence epilepsy is thought to be genetic, though a child might not always have a family member who has seizures or epilepsy.

## **How Is Childhood Absence Epilepsy Diagnosed?**

If your child had a seizure, your doctor probably would want you to see a pediatric neurologist. The neurologist will ask questions about what happened during the seizure, do an exam, and order an EEG to measure brain wave activity.

## **How Is Childhood Absence Epilepsy Treated?**

Childhood absence epilepsy is treated with medication. About 60% of children outgrow absence seizures in their teens, especially if medicine has worked well to control their seizures. Those who don't outgrow them might have seizures into adulthood, but medicine can help control these.

## **What Problems Can Happen?**

Absence seizures are brief and usually do not lead to any physical injury. In rare cases, though, some children can have rare generalized tonic-clonic seizures. Talk to your child's neurologist if you have concerns about these problems.

## **How Can Parents Help?**

If your child takes medicine, make sure you give it exactly as directed. You can also help your child avoid known seizure triggers such as lack of sleep.

Some children have learning or behavior problems even if the seizures are well-controlled. Getting help from specialists early on will support your child's academic and emotional success.

No special care is needed during a typical absence seizure. But because it could lead to a tonic-clonic seizure, make sure that you and other adults and caregivers (family members, babysitters, teachers, coaches, etc.) know what to do if one happens. Your doctor may prescribe an emergency medicine to give if your child has a long seizure or many seizures in a short amount of time. Be sure to ask your doctor about a seizure rescue plan for your child.

## **What Else Should I Know?**

If your child has seizures, reassure them that they're not alone. Your doctor and the care team can answer questions and offer support. They also might be able to recommend a local support group. Online organizations can help too, such as:

- [Epilepsy Foundation](#)
- [CDC – Managing Epilepsy](#)